

Narrator:

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Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton condemned those behind a recent suicide attack in Peshawar, Pakistan. Clinton called the attackers “cowardly,” and said the United States stands “shoulder to shoulder” with the Pakistani people as they confront violent extremists. The attack, which targeted a women’s market and reportedly killed 80 people, came as Clinton made her first trip to Pakistan as secretary of state.

Speaking with Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi in Islamabad on October 28th, the secretary challenged the attackers. If the attackers are so sure of their beliefs, she said, let them join the democratic political process and make their case that they don’t want girls to go to school and women to be given their rights.

Clinton said that this fight is not Pakistan’s alone. The United States will give Pakistan the help it needs in the struggle to achieve peace and security in the country. Clinton called for a defeat of the hard-core elements of extremism, and said there should be openness to those who renounce violence and wish to begin reintegrating themselves into mainstream society.

Foreign Minister Qureshi said Pakistan faces terrorist attacks daily, but said his country’s resolve and determination to fight remains firm in the face of the latest violence. He welcomed Clinton’s visit and the U.S. commitment to help develop Pakistan’s democratic institutions, saying that commitment is a powerful message for the people of Pakistan.

In remarks before her arrival in Pakistan, Clinton addressed misunderstandings over a \$7.5 billion nonmilitary assistance bill passed by the U.S. Congress. The legislation, known as the Kerry-Lugar bill, is intended to provide more help to Pakistan on the civilian side. She said there has been “misinformation” over what the legislation requires from Pakistan. In an interview with Sami Abraham of Geo TV on October 26th, Clinton said there are no conditions imposed on Pakistan by the bill. She said the United States has an obligation to the American taxpayer, because the U.S. government is asking American citizens to help Pakistan. The United States has a reimbursement accountability schedule which is used with everyone around the world, she said.

Both the United States and Pakistan “have governments with bureaucracies,” the secretary said, and “they’re not the easiest things to move and make do what they should do. But we are very committed to this relationship.”

The United States recognizes that, like everyone else, the Pakistani people want good jobs, better incomes and livelihoods, education, and health care for their children. There are misperceptions and misunderstandings existing not only between the two governments, but also between the Pakistani and American peoples. Clinton said it is important for Americans and others “to recognize the high price that the Pakistanis are paying” in taking a stand against violent extremism.

En route to Islamabad October 27th, Clinton told reporters that the Obama administration is trying to turn a page in the U.S. relationship with Pakistan from “what has been in the last several years primarily a security anti-terrorist agenda” to a much broader engagement.

The State Department recently released its 2009 Annual Report on International Religious Freedom. At a special briefing October 26th, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said that there must be a sensible balance between freedom of religion and freedom of speech, and that an individual’s ability to practice his or her religion has no bearing on others’ freedom of speech. “The protection of speech about religion is particularly important, she said. “These differences should be met with tolerance, not with the suppression of discourse.”

The best antidote to intolerance is a combination of comprehensive legal protections against discrimination and hate crimes, government outreach to minority religious groups, and the defense of both freedom of religion and freedom of expression.

Clinton said the United States will always seek to counter negative stereotypes of individuals based on their religion and will stand against discrimination and persecution. Freedom of religion is a founding principle of the United States — but it is a universal value, not just an American value. It is a freedom guaranteed to all people in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

According to Clinton, freedom of religion allows nations to become more stable, secure and prosperous. The introduction to the International Religious Freedom report states that authoritarian regimes that repress religious groups and ideas in the name of stability create the very conditions that subvert their stated goals. Repression radicalizes populations, and interference in peaceful religious practice can harden resentment against the state and lead some to separatism or insurgency. Governments must ensure that their policies on religion do not have negative international consequences.

This year’s report contains assessments of 198 countries and territories, making it one of the most comprehensive reports available. Eight countries “of particular concern” were identified by the State Department as having serious religious freedom violations: Burma, China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Uzbekistan. Although the report highlights abuses by states and societies, it also draws attention to positive steps many countries and organizations are taking. In her remarks, Clinton commended the leadership of the Philippines in the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace at the United Nations, Jordan’s role in initiating the “A Common Word” dialogue, and many other international and domestic initiatives.

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 designates the promotion of religious freedom for all persons as a core objective of U.S. foreign policy. The United States is expanding programs that work to bridge the divide between religious groups. These efforts build on the shared values and common concerns of faith communities to promote lasting peace.

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